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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: TURKEY: CHILD LABOR REPORT RUFFLES GOT

REF: STATE 92560

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Post delivered the points in reftel to appropriate officials in the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MOLSS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The GOT's response ranged from moderately negative to baffled. Even though the USDOL report on Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL) and the Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) Report highlight Turkey's positive efforts to eradicate child labor, officials here see both reports as "punishing with the same hands that applaud," and see the TVPRA goods list as potentially harmful to our bilateral relationship. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On September 8 Labor Attache (LABATT) demarched Huseyin Avni Aksoy, Head of the Department of Multilateral Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), to discuss the release of both reports. While recognizing the country profile for Turkey in the WFCL report each year explains Turkey's efforts to identify and eradicate child labor, he said the effect of publishing the TVPRA list on the same day was to "punish with the same hands that applaud." (NOTE: Even though the TVPRA goods list focuses on both forced and child labor, significant forced labor violations have not been documented in Turkey so the discussion focused only on child labor violations. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Aksoy said he had served in other countries where he witnessed much greater problems in child labor than those in Turkey, but was surprised that Turkey was going to appear alongside those same countries on the TVPRA list. In Turkey, he said, the problem is relatively small and getting smaller due to intense government efforts, which have been recognized by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Aksoy said that if a "proper differentiation" could be made between the widely varying situations in different countries, his government might be less opposed to the list. However, he concluded, this list does nothing to solve the problem of child labor, it only applies disproportionate shame.

¶4. (SBU) On September 9, LABATT discussed the reports with Nafiz Karakulah, the newly appointed head of a newly formed department in the MOLSS that will encompass three offices on child labor, women's issues and the labor of the "disadvantaged" (a mandate yet to be clearly defined, though it will probably include convicts and the disabled). Karakulah assumed his position two days before the meeting. A veteran of the MOLSS for over 20 years, he admitted he had negligible past experience working on child labor issues. Initially friendly and calm, he gave a prepared presentation on the GOT's programs on child labor. However, after LABATT raised the release of the WFCL and TVPRA reports, Karakulah

acted surprised and then became irascible, accusing the USG of using rumors, media reports and speculative opinions to exaggerate the problem of child labor in Turkey.

15. (SBU) When it was explained that the statistics for the WFCL came from his own ministry's Office of Inspections, he said that anyone in the MOLSS who gave statistics to the USG on the TVPRA goods that were listed was not authorized to do so. When LABATT clarified that the TVPRA report used additional sources like an ILO report from 2003 to support its claims, Karakulah said any reports about the child labor issue that were not recently published by the GOT's State Institute for Statistics (TUIK) could not be considered representative data, and that since the problem was statistically so small, anecdotal reports should not be considered significant. (NOTE: The last TUIK report on labor statistics that discussed the child labor issue was published in 2006. END NOTE.) Karakulah threatened to require the Embassy to obtain any future labor statistics through diplomatic note requests via the MFA, and said he would ask his Minister to call the Ambassador to protest if the report was published. When LABATT explained that the report had been open for public comment in Washington in 2008 and was going to be published by the Department of Labor the following day, he said there would be serious negative consequences for the U.S.-Turkey bilateral relationship as a result.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: While the release of the reports was not picked up by the Turkish media on September 10 or 11, any future coverage is unlikely to improve Post's working relationship with Karakulah's office. After his meeting with Labor Attache, Karakulah phoned the head of the MOLSS Office of Inspections and accused Post's source, a veteran inspector, of "speaking to foreigners without authorization." Post's source was later harangued by her supervisor, although she defended her actions because the information she released to Post is public. This is likely to complicate our future data collection.

JEFFREY

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